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THE CIA AND MANIPULATION OF THE AMERICAN PRESS

BY MORTON H. HALPERIN

We have long been aware that one of the CIA's functions was to try to deal with the propaganda from the "other side," by getting the word out about America. Until recently, we were less aware that some of our propaganda techniques overseas dealt not with truth, but with lies—disinformation, black propaganda, and manipulation of the press. All this, the record now shows, was something used against "enemies," and in an effort to shape the policies of neutral and friendly countries.

What has been more difficult to assess is the fact that the CIA's press tactics, developed overseas, have also had fallout in the U.S. press. There are two such issues which I will focus on here: (1) the CIA use of the American and foreign press to influence events and opinions in the United States and (2) the CIA

conduct of background investigations of journalists without their permission and knowledge.

Members of the press, of course, on their own initiative, talk frequently to officials of the CIA both at home and abroad as part of their regular news-gathering activities. No one would want to prevent this. The difficulty arises when the CIA exploits these relations or uses its network of foreign propaganda assets to influence American perceptions or to affect politics in the United States.

The CIA's position is that it simply supplies information to American reporters at their request (presumably as its contribution to keeping the American public informed), and that when it supplies false and misleading information to its foreign assets which ultimately feeds back into the United States, this is viewed as an unintended and undesired consequence.

Even if it were the case that such fallout is clearly unintended, CIA propaganda activities which distort American perceptions are unacceptable and should be prohibited. Leaving

The following article is adapted from the testimony of Morton H. Halperin given before the Subcommittee on Oversight of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, on January 4, 1978.